SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 320.] *FOR THE WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 16, 1895.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.

THE WOMAN IN BLACK

THE men had driven away. Their carts and horses disappeared behind the low hills. They appeared now and then like boats on the crest of a wave, farther each time; and their laughter and singing and shouts grew fainter as the bushes hid them from sight.

The women and children remained, with two old men to protect them. They might have gone, too, the hunters said. "What harm could come in the broad daylight? The bears and panthers were far away. They'd be back by night, with only two carts to fill."

Then Jim, the crack shot of the settlement, said: "We'll drive home the bears in the carts."

The children shouted and danced as they thought of the sport to come, of the hunters' return with their game, of the bonfires they always built.

One pale woman clung to her husband's arm. "But the Indians?" she said.

That made the men all laugh. "Indians," they cried; "why, there've been none here for twenty years. We drove them away down there"—pointing across the plain—"to a hotter place than this, where the sand burns their feet and they ride for days for water."

The pale woman murmured: "Ah, but they returned."

"Yes," cried her big husband, whose brown beard covered his chest, "and burned two cabins. Small harm they did, the curs."

"Hush," said the pale woman, pressing her husband's arm; and the men about were quiet, pretending to fix their saddles as they glanced at another woman, dressed in black, who turned and went into her house.

"I forgot her boy," said the bearded man, as he gravely picked up his gun.

They started off in the morning cool, towards the mountains where the trees grew. And the long shadows lessened as the sun crept up the sky.

The woman in black stood silent by her door. No one bade her good-bye. The other women went back to their houses to work. The children played in the dust; clouds rose as they shouted and ran. A day's freedom lay before them.

But the woman in black still stood by her door, like a spectre in the sunshine, her thin hands clasped together as she gazed away over the plain towards Mexico.

Her face was parched and drawn, as if the sun from the sand had burnt into the bone. Her eyes alone seemed to live; they were hard and bright.

Her house was a little way from the rest, on the crest of a hill facing the desert plain.

She had heard the words of the bearded man—"Small harm the Indians did." Had he forgotten her boy? How could he forget while she was there to remind them of the dead? Near her house was a small rock roughly marked. The rude letters "Will, gone in '69," she had cut on it with her own hands. It marked the last place where her boy had played. She remembered how she went away softly—so he should not cry to follow her—without a word, without a kiss.

Here her hands beat the side of the house.

"Oh, to have that kiss now and die!" But she had gone, unthinking, up the road where the pale woman lived, when a rosy-cheeked bride, not a widow, like herself. They laughed and discussed the newcomers at the settlement. It was a holiday; for the men were away over the hills, cutting down trees to build their houses with.

As they talked there idly, they heard what they thought was the shrill bark of dogs running up the hill. Startled, they went to the window. Round the curve of the road came horses wildly galloping, and upon their backs——Here the pale woman shrieked and fled. They were Indians, beating their

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horses with their bare legs, their black hair streaming in the wind.

Like a flash she had bolted the door and barred the shutters as they galloped up. She turned then. Through the open back she saw the women run screaming up the hill, their children in their arms.

Their children! Where was hers? She stopped as if turned to stone, then undid the door.

They dragged her out by the wrists, by the hair. She fought with them stronger than ten men. But there were twenty; she was alone. The little street was empty. They strangled her, beat down her face, dragged her upon a horse, and, with her crossways on the saddle, galloped up and down, as they fired the cabins and the sheds. Her hands were shackled, and her eyes blind with blood, but she thought only of her child. "Where could he be?"

There were gunshots. Down the hill like mad came the white men for their wives and children.

Then the Indians turned back towards the plain. They rode past her house.

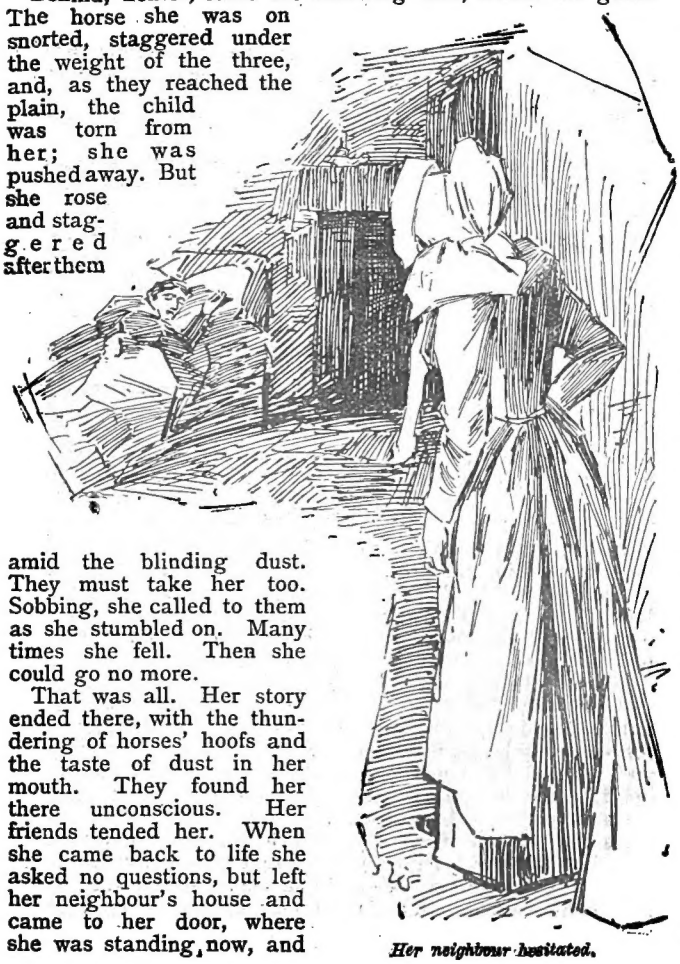
There, where she had left him, stood the child, dazed with surprise. She held out her arms, tied together, and called to him to come.

"Fool! fool!" Here the woman in black struck her temples with her hands. "Fool!" Why had she not galloped by and never noticed him?

But she begged, caught at the horse's head, struggled to get to him, and the Indian stopped for a moment in his flight and caught up the child and went on.

Then the thought came to her of the end of that ride—what was to come—after! And she tried to drop the boy, to let him slide gently to the ground; but the Indian held them fast.

Behind, nearer, came the following men, louder the guns. The horse she was on snorted, staggered under the weight of the three, and, as they reached the plain, the child was torn from her; she was pushed away. But she rose and staggered after them amid the blinding dust. They must take her too. Sobbing, she called to them as she stumbled on. Many times she fell. Then she could go no more.



Her neighbour hesitated.

That was all. Her story ended there, with the thundering of horses' hoofs and the taste of dust in her mouth. They found her there unconscious. Her friends tended her. When she came back to life she asked no questions, but left her neighbour's house and came to her door, where she was standing now, and gazed away over the sand where *he* had gone, down towards Mexico.

The years went by, and she was still alone in the house where *two* should have been. And now, far off, she saw the dust blowing in a long, rolling, pinkish line. But the dust blew so often, and nothing came of it—not even the Indians.

The boy, she knew, was dead, but they—his murderers—remained, somewhere.

If she could have one now in her power!

The woman in black pondered, as she had so many times, how she should torture him. No pain could be too horrible. She looked at the fire in the stove, and piled on the logs—the logs that were brought with so much trouble from the mountains where the trees grew. She could not make it hot enough. She dropped on her knees and watched the iron grow red. And the letters of the maker's name stamped on it grew distinct, and the word "Congress," half defaced, and the figures "64." Ah, those letters! She could have kissed the spot, for her child had touched it. Charmed by the glow when alone, he laid his baby hand flat upon it, and burned deep into the parts were those letters, "ss, 64."

She would know him among a million by that mark.

But he was dead. The Indians remained.

The woman in black stood up. Why should she not go to them? There were pools in the plains where she could drink. That would be enough.

The men were away; the women were at work. Who would stop her?

She put on her bonnet and started off down the hill through the green bushes. The air was still crisp, though the sun was hot.

The desert must have an end. She would keep on to Mexico. She walked quickly, and her dress grew grey with dust, and the air scorching, as she reached the plain. But she kept on, and only looked back once at the house on the hill, and at the window where the pale woman sat.

The dust choked her, and she stumbled, and the sole of one shoe came half off, and slapped, and banged, and delayed her as she walked. She tore it off and went on, but the sand cut and burned her so that she sat down and wept, and wanted to go back for her other pair, the ones she wore on Sundays. The hill, though, looked so distant that she wearily got up and went on, till she could go no more, and crept under the shadow of a rock. There was no water near. Her throat was parched, and her temples beat wildly. She must go back and start again, strengthened, fortified. She would start to-morrow, or at night, when the cool would let her get too far to return.

By slow degrees she dragged herself up the hill. The pale woman came out of her house, and nodded; but the woman in black did not smile in return. She closed the door, and went up to her bed, and fell on it and slept, amid the buzzing of the flies, and the fitful flapping of the window-shade in the breeze.

The pale woman sighed and glanced across the plain. The roll of blowing dust was larger, and more regular, and nearer. The woman shuddered as she watched it creep slowly along behind the sand mounds. "It always blows," she said to herself, "but not like that, so steadily, so even." She strained her eyes, but there was only dust to be seen. Then she thought of a telescope that belonged to the minister's wife, who came from a seaport town, and ran to fetch it. The two women came out with it together, the minister's wife laughing at her friend, she was such a timid thing.

But the pale woman was paler than ever, and trembled so that she could not steady it. The laughing one looked through it, and laughed no more.

"I see a head over the mound there," she said.

The pale woman shrieked.

"They are miles away; we may have time."

"For what?"

"To get away."

"They may be friends——"

"They are Indians! White men would not live through that sand. We must go to the woods. Help me! Warn the women! Gather the children! Come!"

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The axe fell upon the wrist.

She rushed into her house. The other still stood and looked.

The dust-cloud was a little nearer. In a moment all was wild confusion; names were called, but not loudly; girls sobbed; some carried their little treasures; mothers held their children. All gathered together, hidden from the plain by a house.

The pale woman led out her father, then ran to her neighbour's door. She opened it and called clearly, but softly, "Mary! Mary!" There was no answer. The woman in black, on her bed, slept on. Her neighbour hesitated, then hurried after the others, as they ran up the low hills towards the mountains, where their men had gone.

The dust-cloud grew nearer. Now and then a head could be seen. But all was still as the grave. The woman in black slept heavily, and dreamed that revenge had come at last—that in her hand she had an Indian's head.

The window-shade flapped loudly, and she woke with an apprehension crushing her. She went to the window and looked out. There was no blowing dust upon the plains, and the street was empty. The doors of the houses stood open; a shawl lay in the middle of the road. The woman leaned out and looked towards the woods.

She saw on the crest of a hill the white skirts of the flying women, and then below, down the road, her ears sharpened, her heart tightening, she heard the soft, regular thumping of horses' feet.

Then she *knew*.

She sat on the edge of the bed. This was what she had waited for! Was it her turn now!—Or theirs again?

She could kill *one*.

Where was her gun?

She had lent it to the men.

But her axe—that was below.

As she started for it there was a burst of war-cries.

She ran down the narrow stairs and took the axe from its place on the wall.

They were passing her door. The room grew lighter. She turned. One stood in the open doorway, black against the sunshine. She set her teeth hard, hid the axe behind her skirts, and watched him, motionless.

He stretched out his hand, claw-like, and laughed, his eyes gleaming, as, cat-like, he moved nearer. A terror seized her; with a hoarse cry she sprang up the stairs, flinging down a chair as he followed, panting.

Quickly she climbed up the ladder to the loft, threw down the trap-door, fell on it, bolted it, waited. All was still. Outside she heard the distant yells. She stooped noiselessly and put her ear upon the floor. There was soft breathing underneath, and through a crack in the floor she saw an eye peering up at her.

She stood a long time motionless, axe in hand, ready.

Her back was to the bolt, but suddenly she *felt* that there was something there. She turned softly. A slim, brown hand was almost through a crevice in the floor.

She raised her axe. The slender fingers touched the bolt and gently drew it back.

Then, with the force of all her hatred, fell the axe upon the wrist. The hand sprang up at her. With a howl of agony the creature fell bumping beneath.

Then all was again still.

Her face was wet and warm with the spattered blood.

Outside she heard the crackling of a burning house, then gunshots far away, and distant shouts. On tiptoe she went to the garret window, and peeped round its edge. Over the hills, quite near, she saw the men returning. One house was blazing—the minister's. The Indians were retreating. Near her door, grazing, stood a riderless horse. *She* knew its owner. As they rode past they caught at it, but were stopped by a shout from her door. An Indian rushed out, handsome, young, holding aloft a bare right arm without a hand. In his language he shrieked to them for revenge, pointing up with his red wrist to the attic where she stood.

The eyes of the woman shot fire. She leaned far out and shook her fist from the garret window.

"One Indian, at least!"

She hurled the axe at them. It fell far short. They fired as they passed, but none hit her. Nearer came the men.

The wounded man leaped to his horse and rode on. The woman laughed as he passed beneath, then sat down in the dusty loft with a red pool at her feet.

Shortly the men returned. Some went by down the hill

"Have you killed any?"

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after the Indians. Others put out the fire. All was confusion, bustle, shouts.

Then the women and the children came and added to the din, and the men who had followed returned. But the woman in black sat alone in the loft till she heard the crowd at her door below, and the voice of the pale woman say:

"Where is Mary?"

She rose and lifted the trap-door—it was unbolted—and went down.

The pale woman came to her, but she pushed her aside, and wiped her face with her sleeve.

"Are they killed—any of them?" she said. Her friend answered, "No, Mary, not one." "No harm this time," said the bearded man. "Except my house is burned," said the minister's wife. "We'll soon have another."

"I don't mean *you!*" cried the woman in black. "I mean them—the red devils. Have you got any?—killed any? *You*"—this to the bearded man—"Have *you* killed any?"

And the men answered, "No."

And one man said, "Their horses were faster than ours."

"Not one!" The woman in black drew herself up proudly. "Yes, one; better than killed. Wait!" The women shrunk from her as she climbed up the stairs. They looked at each other wonderingly. The woman returned with something in her grasp. She flung it on the table. "It is an Indian's hand. His arm will shrivel to the bone. They will leave him some day to die in the sand." The women shuddered and drew back; the men crowded round, but they did not touch the hand.

"Are you afraid?" said the woman in black; "afraid of that thing?"

She bent back the fingers and looked in it with a smile of contempt. Her face took an ashen hue; the hand struck the table edge and fell on the floor. She seemed to be trying to think for a second, then she gave one awful cry, and leaned her face against the wall, with her hands hanging at her side.

The pale woman tried to go to her, but her husband drew her back, and, with a silent crowd around, slowly picked up the hand.

For a second he hesitated, then did as she had done, but gently. He bent the fingers of the severed hand, and read its history written there, "ss, 64," in white letters on the palm.

He remembered then how, twenty years ago, when she brought the child to him, he had tied its little hand in cooling salve.

It was larger now.

The whisper went round, "It is her boy's hand," and they crept towards the door.

The pale woman took a flower from her dress, one she had put there hours before, and placed it in the brown fingers on the table, and went out.

The woman did not stir from the wall. "Leave the hand," she said.

"It is there," and the bearded man closed the door gently after him.

The woman in black turned. Her hard eyes were dim now. She took the hand from the table and undid her dress and placed it in her breast, and went to the window and watched, far off, a cloud of dust made golden by the sun as it rolled away across the plain, down towards Mexico.

BIBLIOTECA BODLEIANA

His Lordship

IT was in the deep pine woods of Florida. The wind, dallying through the needles, played soft music above their heads and wafted balsamic scent about them. Sandy, stretched at full length, could only answer her tirade of girlish talk in monosyllables for looking at her. She was surpassingly pretty, with auburn hair which the Southern sun kissed into ropes of gold. Her eyes were brown, with a dangerous tendency to grow soft and deep. Her skin was very fair, with clear pink colouring and some tiny freckles. She sat leaning against a moss-covered tree trunk, her hands toying with a pine cone as she talked.

"I should have been a man," she said. "When I graduated last June I had a very fair prospect in the world. When one is born merely a Society girl one's place is in a city, of course. I had no thought under heaven but that I should stay in London and enjoy living. Then, when papa announced his intentions of going to Florida in the autumn, I looked upon it merely as a lark. Now I know. And we are to live here always. Think of it! In this wilderness, with no advantages, no servants. Some of my girl friends write to me. I do not tell them I wash the dishes and make the fire for my mother to get the meals upon. I am learning to cook."

"What do you tell them?" asked Sandy, to brighten her thoughts.

"I tell each one something different. I tell my art student friend of the beautiful scenery; my literary chum of the queer backwoods people. To another I write merely chatter. I wrote of the dance we went to in Fallonton's barn. I—I described the only man I have met. That is you, sir."

"How did you describe me?" he asked.

"I told her you were as tall as the pine trees, and just as painfully thin. Nay, now, but I did not. I said you were tall and slender, with blue eyes, dark hair, and fine teeth. I said that you did not talk much, but that what you said was good." Her eyes laughed.

"Does she know you well?" he asked.

"Better than anyone."

"Doubtless, then, she will understand that I cannot find opportunities to talk much."

There was a little silence after this, broken by Sandy's peculiar soft laugh.

"My lady," he said gently, "that is but as one of the pine needles. It pricks a bit, but it is easily bent."

"Then I told her," continued Cris, "that you had come from Scotland for your health, and that, like myself, you were poor, and trying to raise a crop of potatoes off a patch of ground no larger than a man's hand."

Sandy blushed faintly, but he did not remove his blue eyes from her sparkling face. Cris, quite unconcerned, finished her story.

"My friend calls you 'his lordship.'"

"She invests prosaic me with a romance, then?"

"Yes. It makes it more interesting, you know." Cris

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rose. "I am going. You need not come. Call for me on Sunday at four o'clock."

"Then you will go rowing after all?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, of course. I was only tantalising you. Good-bye, your lordship," she laughed.

"Good-bye, your ladyship," he said, lifting his hat.

Cristine Hayden, commonly called Cris, went her way over the fallen pine needles, and he went his. He walked with his head bent, thinking.

"I have known her five months. She is only eighteen; I am twenty-five. She has beauty, health, youth, no regrets. I have but a delicate body and a mind oppressed. Oh! well. It may all come right some day yet!"

Heaving a tremendous sigh he struck into a brisk pace, and soon neared the little piece of land and the cabin he called home, and as he beheld it a light danced into his clear eyes, and he gave a short mirthful laugh.

Cris, meantime, had a longer road to travel. The soft-carpeted woods were with her for the most part; then along the river, and so home.

Then she went indoors to help her mother prepare dinner. At the table Mr. Hayden was quite talkative, and had much to say about the orange plantation where his business interests lay.

"Cris, your friend Mr. Irvin has been promoted. The boss is very well pleased with him. Quiet young man, but good worker. Delicate, isn't he?"

"Yes, but Sandy Irvin has a brave spirit. I think he is an honest young man."

"Precisely. That is why they raised him."

So, he had been promoted and had not told her! What a queer fellow he was. But then, it was her own fault! It was just as he had said. She had not given him an opportunity to talk. She had met him by accident as she walked home through the woods, and she had at once begun to tell him of a report she had heard. The district school was in need of a teacher and she wanted the place in order to make a little money for herself. They had always talked poverty to each other. So he was promoted!

On Sunday afternoon his lordship came strolling in at half-past three. He was always a trifle early, because then he did not have to hurry. They started at four o'clock in the trim little boat which was the apple of Sandy's eye. There was a charm about the river which Cris could never explain. She always connected Sandy with it, for she had never been for a row with anyone else.

"I am going to take you up the river to-day," he said; "I have often promised that I would do so, but by some fate or another we have always gone down."

"We are going up?" asked Cris.

"Yes."

"Towards the plantation?"

"Yes." Sandy looked at her a bit keenly.

"I feel hurt that you did not tell me you were promoted," she pouted; "to have a bit of news in this desolate region, and not to tell me!"

"You were so much more interesting that I forgot it," he said, audaciously. Cris, mollified, congratulated him.

Sandy looked at the shore, at his feet, at his hands on the oars, at Cris.

"I have some news to-day," he said, "that may interest you. I saw Hobber this morning. He says you may perhaps obtain the school, but he wants to question you first."

Cris leaped to her feet in the boat.

"Take care!" warned Sandy.

Cris sat down again, demurely folding her hands together and gazing at his lordship.

"Don't look at me so," he said, in his quiet way, "or I may be tempted to tell you something else."

Cris dropped her eyes, and the most exquisite colour streamed over her face.

"I shall tell you, anyway," he said.

"No—oh, no—don't," cried Cris.

"Oh, I wish to tell you," he said; "I have been having a small house built. It is copied from one in Chicago. It is there behind you."

Cris turned and looked. It was back among trees and shrubs, but she could see that it was a charming cottage—all but completed, clean and new.

"Would you like to look at it?" he asked her.

"Yes," said Cris, quietly.

They landed. The sky looked very blue and clear, and formed a background for the little gabled house which sat amidst the deep green of the pines. Down to the left stretched out the river in a long, broad, shining ribbon. To the right, in the distance, began the orange groves where Sandy was to work in the management. Cris's heart beat excitedly as they went up the lawn to the cottage. His lordship unlocked the portals of his domain, and threw wide the door for Cris to step across the threshold. It was quite an immense house. There were six rooms. What would his lordship do with six rooms?

Cris raved over it. How pretty it would be when it was furnished. He must have such and such a thing here, and she herself would make the curtains for the little windows in the hall, and so on.

"It shall not be completed for a year," he said.

"Why not, your lordship," asked Cris, who was pleased to maintain the little fiction.

"Because I do not wish it," he said, locking the door behind them.

They were out into the sunshine again. From much thinking Cris was quiet. At the brink once more he helped her into the boat, and as they floated down the enchanted river Sandy lifted up his beautiful voice and sang while they glided by the mist-green shores.

Cris obtained the school, thanks to Sandy. The children soon adored her, and she grew quite fond of her life.

One day she was riding through the pine forest, near the place where she and Sandy had talked that day almost eight months ago. She was thinking over what one of her scholars had said—a girl as old as her teacher. This pupil and Cris had become great friends. She told Cris that there had been whispers in the neighbourhood about Sandy Irvin.

They all believed he came from Scotland, but they said he was an outlaw. Rapt in indignation over this, Cris rode almost plump upon him. He sat by the mossy tree reading a letter of many thin pages. When he saw Cris he rose, blushing like a boy. But his eyes burned into hers with a deep intensity.

"I want to ask you something," she said.

And then she told him what she had heard, boldly and fearlessly, with never a wince. She finished, and waited his reply.

"I will go home with you," he said.

"No," said Cris, drawing rein, "tell me here."

He leaned upon the pony's neck, looking at Cris as he spoke.

"I was born in Scotland. My father, Lord Wavertree, was a rich landowner. I had a brother older than myself, with whom I could never agree. When my father died Angus succeeded to the titles and estates. I had just graduated at Edinburgh, and was to have been a lawyer. My health failed me, and I came to this country. Of course, I was poor. I was hopeless—until I met you. Then I went to work. I was ashamed to offer myself until I could give something with it. I built the cottage out of what I had. I said, I will work for a year first, that I may start a small fund I—I find I need not wait to tell you that I love only you in the whole world, and ask you to be my wife. Give me my answer now."

"I do not know," began Cris, slowly. "I—you must have seen that I love you, for I do. But—I have others to think of. If we are poor it is best not to marry."

"You said you loved me," he said, with her hand to his lips, "that is enough. I have received word to-day that—ah! my darling, how can I tell you? It seems so unreal. My brother is dead. He had no children. Therefore, I succeed, and must go back home to Scotland."

"After all, then," said Cris, "Mamie was right. You are your lordship."

"And you?" he said, looking into her eyes.

"I? I—I shall—be—"

"Your ladyship," he answered for her.

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THE STORY OF A STRANGE DEVICE

LIKE all really great men, Mr. Phillipus Snodgrass was modest about his own accomplishments. Few people, not even his own relations and friends, had any idea of the actual position which he occupied in the great world of business. The loose expression that he was "something in the City" by no means gave the impression that the heads of three or four hundred of the largest firms in London were in constant consultation with him over some of their most delicate daily transactions.

That Mr. Snodgrass suffered occasionally from periods of financial depression was not a matter of any great surprise in these times when the millionaire of yesterday is the dustman of to-day, and the mendicant of to-day is the philanthropist of to-morrow.

There were those, however, who noticed that it was during one of the most enduring of these moments of temporary embarrassment that Mr. Snodgrass, at the age of 51, suddenly grew tired of living alone, and startled the whole circle of his friends by the announcement of his marriage with a certain Miss Willoughby, whose father had recently died leaving her £50,000 entirely at her own disposal.

The coincidence, if it was nothing more, was a remarkable one, and all the more so because Miss Willoughby, who might have been pretty fifteen or twenty years ago, was now decidedly passé and faded.

Mr. Snodgrass, however, was entirely indifferent to the covert criticisms of those who, from the blackness of their own hearts, considered that no other motive than the love of money would have led him to take the great irrevocable step of wedlock. At first it was apparent that he even neglected his business to devote himself to his wife, with that absolute desire to make life happy for her, and to insist on her slightest whim becoming law, which has an exactly opposite effect to that intended on silly empty-headed little women like Mrs. Snodgrass, who cry their eyes out until a man grovels at their feet and then kick him to show how they despise his attitude.

Now this policy is all very well in the hands of a lady who is young and pretty, and it was unfortunate for Mrs. Snodgrass she did not realise that the time when she could afford to be charmingly capricious had passed. There is a certain type of womanhood, however, who can never be brought to understand this any more than that the fact that they paint and powder their face, and wear false teeth and camel hair fringes, is no secret between themselves and their maid.

For a time Mr. Snodgrass took his wife's hectoring in excellent part, but as days went by and she grew more exacting and less inclined to fall in with his views, it became very clear to everyone that the relations between husband and wife were strained, to say the least of it.

Finally there was the inevitable scene. Mr. Snodgrass came to the conclusion that he had been wasting his time in adoring a painted idol of wood or stone, and returned to business condoling himself upon his unfortunate selection by the thought that, if his wife had no affection and no womanly feeling, she had a very desirable little fortune of £50,000 in the bank.

Picture, then, his indignation and disgust when Amelia flatly refused to allow him to touch a penny of her money, and still less to invest it in his business, of which she did not even know the nature. In vain Mr. Snodgrass pleaded; in vain he protested that as a partner in his concern her private fortune would increase a hundred per cent. per annum; in vain he went down on his knees; in vain he threatened and used hard words. Mrs. Snodgrass remained obdurate.

"I see it all now," she declared with tears in her eyes, "you married me for my money. That was all you cared for. But you were mistaken if you thought you were going to twist me round your little finger. You are very much mistaken if you think I am going to sacrifice everything to a mean, selfish, unprincipled man like you," and if her feelings had not been restrained by the fear of revealing the rouge on her cheeks by the tear tracks, Mrs. Snodgrass would certainly have burst into a storm of weeping, or, at the least, gone into hysterics.

After this defeat and rebuff Mr. Snodgrass grew more and more cold in his manner. He spent longer hours at his office and three or four nights in the week came home after dining at the club. If relations were strained before, they were on the point of breaking now. His behaviour removed all doubt from Amelia's mind that her husband had married her simply and solely for what he could make out of her purse. This made her desperate.

Those who sided with Mrs. Snodgrass afterwards (when the Snodgrass family matters became the topic of the hour) were disposed to the belief that the course she adopted of flirting desperately with the Hon. Frederick Charles was merely a little ruse to bring her husband to his senses; while those who looked at the matter from a less frivolous point of view said that she deserved all she afterwards got as a senseless and unprincipled woman.

The way of it was this.

One afternoon at the height of the London season, Mrs. Snodgrass had ordered her carriage for her customary afternoon drive in the park, and while listening to the band she suddenly became conscious that an elegantly-dressed young man, lounging against the railings, was staring at her in a very marked manner.

At the moment she was annoyed, and studiously turned her head in an opposite direction. Presently, however, a vague feeling of gratified vanity stole over her, and she shot a little glance in his direction.

The young man immediately dropped his eyes in a well-bred manner with a little start of apology, but the next instant he looked again in Mrs. Snodgrass's direction, and this time their eyes met.

Mrs. Snodgrass felt her pulses quicken at this flattering attention from a young man whose dignified bearing, and many acquaintances among the well-dressed and fashionable crowd passing up and down, marked him out as a man of some standing in society.

No doubt Mr. Snodgrass's recent neglect made this tribute to her attractive appearance all the more acceptable, and when, after their eyes had met several times, the young man suddenly raised his hat and approached her carriage, Mrs. S. flushed with pleasure at the thought of a little romance.

"I believe we have had the pleasure of meeting before, Mrs. Snodgrass," the young gentleman observed, with a slight inclination of his head.

The lady started when he mentioned her name, for she was quite convinced that they had never set eyes on one another previously. Evidently he had been attracted by her appearance, and had taken the trouble to ascertain her name for the sake of an informal introduction.

"What a long time it is since I have seen you," she cried, gaily, stretching out her hand, and holding the young man's, perhaps a little longer than was necessary.

The Hon. Charles took the cue at once, and the most careful

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listener could not have detected a single syllable to raise the suspicion that they were absolute strangers to one another.

At last there was a general movement among the carriages, and Mrs. Snodgrass felt that it was a moment which would require considerable tact.

"Perhaps I may call to-morrow afternoon in the hope of meeting your husband," observed the Hon. Charles, as their hands clasped for an instant.

"Tea at any time between three and five," answered Mrs. Snodgrass, with a fascinating smile. "Delighted if you care to come."

"Let me see—13, Eaton Square is your new address, is it not?"

"17, Grosvenor Place—yes. Don't forget. Good-bye," and the next moment she was leaning back in her carriage with flushed cheeks, and feeling deliciously naughty and happy.

It was not until the next day, when, needless to say, Mr. Snodgrass was not at home, that his wife learned the name of her new acquaintance. From that moment she was doubly charmed, and began to fall in love with the handsome young Guardsman in earnest.

Although his visits were soon of almost daily occurrence, Mr. Snodgrass, owing to the late hours he kept at his office, was not allowed to hear anything of them. In this way things went on for a time, until what had begun as a more or less harmless flirtation became a very serious matter with at least one of the parties concerned.

"By the way, Amelia," exclaimed the Hon. Charles, as he rose to go one afternoon after an unusually prolonged visit, "I am going round to Martin's place for my sister to put five pounds on 'Thistle' for the Drapers' Cup. I suppose you don't care to have a little flutter?"

Mrs. Snodgrass hesitated.

Gambling she held in abhorrence—horse-racing was a crime.

Once or twice when her husband had suggested "placing" a little money for her she had drawn herself up and dismissed the matter with scathing ridicule. She hesitated, wavered, and gave way. How could she refuse on principle to amuse herself in the same way as her admirer's sister, the Hon. Violet Charles.

The £5 which she intrusted to her dear boy "Freddie" brought back, to her astonishment, not unmingled with gratitude, a cheque for £100, signed by the famous bookmaker, Martin.

At first Mrs. S. could hardly believe her eyes. Then she grew excited. What an easy way of making money! This was certainly better than investing it in her husband's business. The horrid man! He should never touch a penny of her fortune.

The next day she increased her stakes; and won again. The gambling fever took possession of her. Her winnings mounted up. She had never known what it was to live before. How exhilarating! How exciting!

The Hon. Charles was in his element. His knowledge of racing matters was inexhaustible. He could not afford to invest much himself, but all his knowledge was at my lady's disposal. There were losses, of course, sometimes. The gambling fever coursed through her veins. She must win back every penny that has gone.

A month passed. The losses out-balanced the gains!

Mrs. S. dipped deeply into her banking account.

And lost.

She doubled her stakes.

And lost.

The Hon. Charles advised her earnestly to stop.

She would not listen to him. Her luck must change.

Two months passed.

Only a few hundreds of her fortune remained.

Mrs. S. grew desperate. She could not depend on the newspapers. The reporters knew nothing about the matter. With the Hon. Charles in attendance she went from race meeting to race meeting, and sometimes only reached home a moment before her husband returned from business.

It was on the occasion of one of these expeditions that the Hon. Charles and Mrs. S. sat side by side in a first-class carriage of a racing special, with their heads very close together, comparing the entries in their betting-books.

As usual, luck had been against them. Neither of them, however, had lost much. In fact, the Hon. Charles always insisted on doing the greater part of Mrs. Snodgrass's transactions through the celebrated firm of Martin.

Just as the train was leaving the station the door was thrown open, and Mr. Snodgrass in a white top hat, grey frock coat, and field-glasses under his arm jumped in, and threw himself down on the opposite seat of the carriage.

The guilty couple sprang apart.

The Hon. Charles turned white to the lips. His jaw fell. His knees knocked together. As for Mrs. Snodgrass, she shrank back on the cushions, staring at the new-comer with terrified eyes.

"Amelia!"

"Phillipus!"

"What are you doing here. By Heaven——"

Mrs. S. raised her hands with a supplicating gesture, while the Hon. Charles moved a little further towards the other end of the carriage.

"What are you doing here with that scoundrel? Do you know, madam, the character of the man with whom you appear to be on such intimate terms?" A sudden stoppage of the train checked the torrent of his wrath.

The Hon. Charles sprang to his feet and threw open the carriage door. Divining his intention, Mr. Snodgrass made a grab at his coat tails, and missed them, as he jumped out on to the line and disappeared.

"If I ever see your face again, you blackguard," he screamed, "I'll horsewhip you to within an inch of your life."

Then he turned on his wife, who, finding herself deserted, uttered a cry of despair, smiting her hands to her face.

"So, madam," he said, "this is how you have been amusing yourself while I have been at my profession."

"You deserted me," sobbed Mrs. S.

"I did nothing of the sort," retorted Mr. S.

"You did," reiterated Mrs. S. "If you had treated me properly I should never have had to turn to anyone else," and she burst into a flood of tears.

"I admire your choice of a substitute," sneered Mr. S.

"At all events, he loves me, which is more than you do, you heartless wretch," sobbed the wife.

There was a moment's silence.

"You are aware, of course," observed Mr. S., maliciously, "that I shall apply for a divorce?"

For an instant the poor woman seemed stunned by his words. Then she raised her head with some show of spirit.

"Then I shall be at liberty to marry the man I love," she cried, and broke off with another sob.

"Don't flatter yourself. You will never see the Hon. Charles again."

"You don't know what a noble man he is," said Mrs. S., with a defiant glance.

"Don't I!" and Mr. S. laughed cruelly. "Perhaps you don't know that I bribed him to make love to you. Perhaps you don't know that I saved him from ruin to teach you to gamble away your fortune. Perhaps you don't know that *I am Martin, the bookmaker*, and I thank you, madam, for the fortune of which I was never to touch a penny!"

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THE OUTLAWS OF THE AIR.

By GEORGE GRIFFITH,

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "The Syren of the Skies," &c.

CHAPTER XLV.

VENDETTA.

IT will be necessary now, in order to preserve the continuity of the narrative, to leave Max Renault, and the followers who, in his estimation, were bidding fair to become conspirators, to await the development of events, which might, perhaps, be pregnant with the future fate of civilised society, and rejoin the *War-Hawk* and her crew, as she left Newcastle with the partially disabled *Vengeur* in tow.

Three of her men were sent on board the captured vessel to get the engines into order as far as possible, and to keep up the supply of power to the lifting fans, so that the *War-Hawk* might not have any downward drag upon her, and could so tow her through the air at the highest possible speed. She was able to travel a little over seventy-five miles an hour under these conditions, and an hour or two before dawn on the following morning she and her prize of war dropped through the darkness upon Lundy Island, and found that the *Volante* was still there waiting, although she was quite twelve hours late for the appointed rendezvous.

"This is altogether unexpected good luck," said Sir Harry, as he shook hands with Adams. "We were afraid you would have got tired of waiting for us, and thought that something had happened to us, and so have gone off on a relief expedition to find us. In fact, as matters turned out we did almost want a relief, because we'd hardly got into the air——"

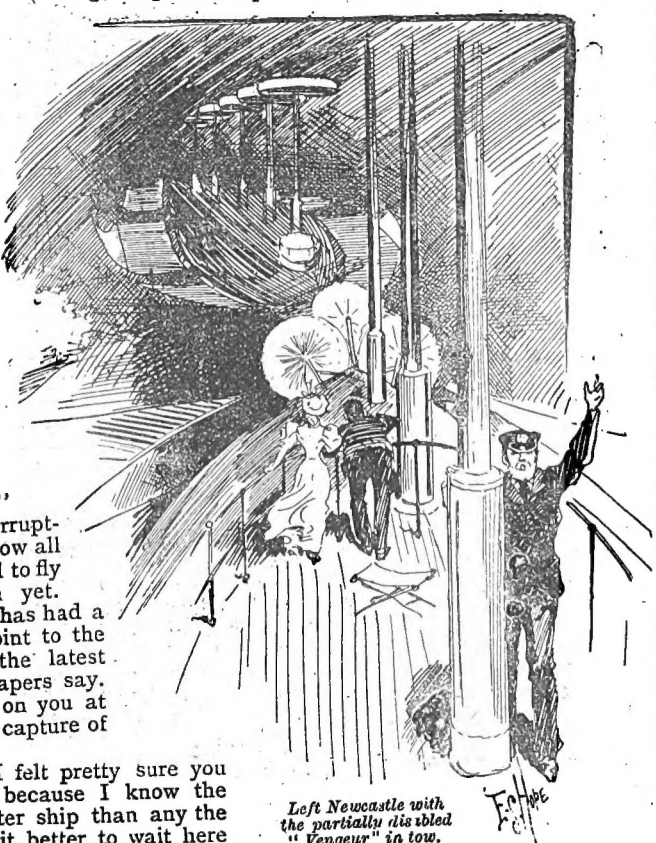
"Oh, yes," said Adams, interrupting him with a laugh. "I know all about that. We haven't learned to fly quite as fast as the telegraph yet. You forget that the Syndicate has had a private wire laid from Bull Point to the island, so that we could get the latest intelligence, as the evening papers say. We know all about the attack on you at Farne Island, and your brilliant capture of the *Vengeur* and her crew.

"That's why we waited. I felt pretty sure you could take care of yourselves, because I know the *War-Hawk* is a good deal better ship than any the Anarchists have, so I thought it better to wait here till you came than go off after you on a wild goose chase—I don't mean anything rude, you know—and perhaps miss you after all, and then make you miss us here at the rendezvous."

"Oh, but we've done more than that," said Sir Harry. "We sent one of the Anarchists' ships into perdition with a well-aimed shell, and terrible things those shells are, I can tell you, when they hit squarely. It was like a charge of shot from a choke-bore gun under the wing of a partridge. She stopped dead and went down like a stone, and when she struck the ground she went off like a shell full of dynamite. But I am sorry to say we let the other one go. We had to, and what made it all the more exasperating was the fact that we learnt from the prisoners we took that that blackguard Renault was in command of her."

"Oh, yes, we know all about that too," laughed Adams, again interrupting him. "By to-morrow morning that news will be all over England, and, perhaps, Europe, and if the Anarchists have got anything like a fleet together I'm afraid there'll be something like disaster come of that. However, that's not our business. If the authorities are silly enough to make this sort of thing public property they must, of course, run the risk of telling the Anarchists what has happened. You did all you could without taking the law into your own hands. For my own part I think I should have shot the brutes on sight, but then I haven't got quite orthodox ideas about law and order, and the authority and dignity of the powers that be."

"It's quite possible that that might have been the wisest course," said Mr. Austen, who had joined the pair just at this moment. "But somehow we couldn't bring ourselves to send the wretches into eternity in cold blood, although it might have been wiser from the point of view of public safety."



Left Newcastle with the partially disabled "Vengeur" in tow.

"Oh, well, that doesn't matter now," said Adams. "If the authorities can't take care of their prisoners when they have them delivered into their hands, that's their business. But there was another reason why I waited for you—something a good deal more important I fancy than even the capture of the *Vengeur* and her crew."

"Oh, indeed," said Sir Harry, lifting his eyebrows. "And what might that be?"

"Well, come into the farmhouse and have a drop of whiskey and a smoke in comfort, and I'll tell you all about it," said Adams, leading the way to the homestead which the Syndicate had purchased with the island.

Sir Harry and Mr. Austen followed him, after sending a messenger back to the *War-Hawk* to tell Violet and Dora not to expect them for the present, and when they had established themselves in the sitting-room of the farmhouse Adams went on with his story.

"About an hour before sunset last night the steam launch came off from Ilfracombe flying our private signal, and landed at the jetty, and Markham, who has been running her since we came down here, brought up a man who had a letter for me from Mr. Maxim. This letter introduced him as a Corsican, named René Berthauld, who had satisfied him that he had important information to give us, and asked me to cross-examine him about it.

"He also told me that the man had been given distinctly to understand that if I was not satisfied with what he had to say he would not be allowed to leave the island alive. So you see the man, as it were, brought his life in his hand—about the best pledge that a man could bring; so I heard his story, and I was satisfied with it. At the same time, guessing that you would be here soon, I didn't care to do anything definite on my own responsibility, so I kept him here, and telegraphed

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back to the office that I would do nothing until you arrived. Now the man's here yet, and if you would like he shall come down and tell his story *in extenso* before us all; perhaps it will sound more interesting from his lips than from mine."

"Oh, by all means!" said Mr. Austen. "You have whetted our curiosity quite far enough to show that there is something interesting behind this."

"Yes, and something *very* interesting I can tell you," said Adams, "not only as regards the actual information, but also as showing how a man, doing what certainly appears to be exactly the right thing to do at a given juncture, makes the one fatal mistake of his life."

"Now you have sent our curiosity up to boiling point," said Sir Harry. "Let us have him in at once, and get our suspense relieved."

"Very well, you shall have him here in a moment," said Adams, getting up and leaving the room as he spoke.

In a couple of minutes he came back accompanied by a man of medium height and middle age, whose dark olive complexion, black hair, and somewhat deep-set black eyes betrayed his southern origin at a glance. His face showed a curious mixture of shrewdness and openness, but there was something about the square brow and the squarer jaw which gave Sir Harry and Mr. Austen the impression that he was the sort of man whom it would be better to have for a friend than an enemy.

"Now, M. Berthauld," said Adams politely, motioning him to a chair, "these are the two gentlemen of whom I spoke to you. Take a cigar and help yourself to whiskey, and then oblige us by telling your story over again in order that they may understand all the particulars better than they might understand them from me. This is Sir Harry Milton, and this is Mr. Frederick Austen."

The stranger bowed to Sir Harry and Mr. Austen in turn with that natural grace which, among the peoples of the south, seems to supply the place of aristocratic breeding, helped himself to a cigar from a box on the table, while Adams mixed him a glass of whiskey and water, and then, with the air of a man who has something important to say and doesn't want to waste any time in saying it, settled himself in the chair and began his story forthwith in French, after being assured that all his hearers would understand him:

"Gentlemen, I am a Corsican. My name, as you already know, is René Berthauld, and I was born thirty-four years ago at Porta Vecchio in Corsica. I had an elder brother named Victor, three years older than I, who, after the death of my father, became head of our family. Six years ago, or thereabouts, my brother, who I may say, without disrespect to his memory, was a man of more imagination than education, and a man, too, whom fate had not treated very kindly, became disgusted with the order of things as they are arranged in Europe, and I may say, too, without offence to you gentlemen, that that order of things presses somewhat hardly upon those who have nothing but a pair of hands at the end of fairly strong arms for their patrimony in life.

"My brother became a Socialist through listening to the lectures of those who find it easier to talk than to work, and from that he became a member of the Mala Vita, which, as you know, is an Italian secret society whose hand is against every man's. But this did not content him for long, and at last he joined the Anarchists. He was suspected of being concerned in the bomb outrage in the Liceo Theatre in Barcelona, which you gentlemen will, no doubt, remember, and from Spain he fled to London—the universal refuge of all Anarchists and criminals who have made their own countries too hot to hold them.

"I corresponded with him from Rome, where I had got employment in the municipal electric lighting works, and in all my letters I exhorted him to cut off his connection with the Anarchists and return to a decent way of life, for I am a practical man myself, and I have no faith in these theories for undoing the work of hundreds of years at a single stroke.

"At last my letters seemed to have some effect upon him. He told me that he had determined to forsake the Anarchists, but he said that he was, by this time, so far implicated in their doings that unless he could win the pardon of the authorities by some great stroke against the Anarchists it would be impossible for him to live except in constant fear for his life or liberty. Then, after that, he hinted at some great blow that was to be delivered by the members of the Group that he belonged to.

"Gentlemen, I am a Corsican."

"It was Autonomie Group No. 7, which had its headquarters somewhere in London, though, of course, he would never tell me where, and he said that he would foil this great design and save Europe from such a shock as it had never had before. In this letter he mentioned one name as that of the leading spirit of the Group. It was a name that you gentlemen and all the world now know too well—Max Renault."

The Corsican paused for a moment, and Sir Harry and Mr. Austen said in a breath:

"Ah now, that's getting interesting. Go on, please. We are listening with all our ears."

"It is even so," said Berthauld. "But it shall be more interesting before I have done. That was the last letter that I ever had from my brother. I wrote to him at his lodgings, and the letter came back marked 'Gone Away' through the English post office. Victor had never failed to answer a letter of mine before, but before my letter came back to me all Europe was ringing with the assassination of President Carnot by Caserio Santo.

"Now I knew Santo slightly, and he knew that I had a brother who was Anarchist, and it was from him I learnt that, although these people profess to act entirely as their own minds prompt them, they are really under the direction of a governing Group, and that Group is always in London, because that is the only place where they can be safe.

"As soon as I learnt this I put two and two together, as you say. My brother had told me of the great blow that was to fall on Europe, and said that he would prevent it, but the blow had fallen, and my brother had disappeared. From that it did not take much reasoning for me to convince myself that Victor had betrayed himself, or had been betrayed in some way, and that the Anarchists had killed him as a traitor.

"I gave notice at the works and drew what wages were due to me, and with these and my savings I went to London, but not before I had become a member of the Cette Group of Anarchists, to which Santo himself belonged. I gave my name as Gabriel Malato, and under that name I travelled to London with credentials from the Cette Group. I can tell you I was not in London very long before I made the acquaintance of several of the London Anarchists, and not very much longer

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before I met one Rolland, who introduced me to Max Renault himself as a candidate for membership of the Group No. 7.

"You may be sure that I was put through a pretty searching examination, but my brother's letters had told me so much about the Anarchist organisation that what I had learned from them, together with my passports from the Cette Group, satisfied even Renault himself at last, and so I was admitted. On the night of my admission Renault told me that in the very room in which I took the oath he had with his own hand shot a traitor named Victor Berthauld, who had almost betrayed the plans for the assassination of President Carnot.

"Gentlemen, what better proof did I want than that? The Fates had led me to London, and had placed me face to face with my brother's murderer, and, more than that, the murderer had confessed to me with his own lips. But Max Renault, clever as he is, made a mistake when he confessed that to me in his boasting way to warn me of the doom that would be mine if I turned traitor.

"He thought that Victor Berthauld was a Frenchman, and that Gabriel Malato was an Italian. He did not know that Victor Berthauld and Gabriel Malato were brothers and Corsicans. Now, gentlemen, you will understand why I became an Anarchist in profession, and joined the Group No. 7. You have heard of the Vendetta. Look you, look at this!" and as he spoke the Corsican bared his right arm to the elbow and showed on his forearm a livid scar in the form of a cross.

"That is the sign of the Vendetta. You know what it means. Blood for blood. The night that Renault confessed that my brother had died by his hand, I went home and cut that cross with my dagger, and as the blood came out I kissed the sign and swore that his life and those of his companions should pay for Victor's, and so they shall.

"Without betraying my name, I gave information to the police in London which led, as perhaps you know, to the club being raided—the club with which they used to cover their meetings—and four of them were arrested. Max Renault himself and Franz Hartog, the German who commanded the *Destroyer*, and Rolland, and an Italian named Cassano were captured. You know what happened. This stupid English justice let them go again because they had a clever advocate, and because they could not prove for the satisfaction of a stupid jury that they had made bombs or actually stabbed the President, and so for that time my vengeance was defeated.

"That is the sign of the Vendetta."

"But I was not discouraged. The group broke up, and Renault went away to your island of Utopia, where he got the air-ship, and Hartog went to Germany to build the boat which he stole, and Lea Cassilis, Renault's sweetheart, disappeared, and afterwards came out in Paris as Madame Cora Dail——"

"Good heavens! you don't mean to say that that pretty little woman was really his sweetheart?" broke in Sir Harry. "Oh, Lord, what fools she made of us at the theatre that night, and of me in particular! Well, never mind; go on please, it can't be helped now."

"There is not much more to tell," continued the Corsican. "I kept friends with Rolland, and when Renault returned I was able to learn all that was going on. Now I know the agents of these Anarchists and their plans; and more than that, I know where their hiding-place is; and if you will take me on board one of your air-ships I will lead you to it, up near the summit of Mount Pietra in the Cantabrian Mountains, and you shall destroy it.

"Mind, gentlemen, I am not an Anarchist, nor am I a spy or a traitor. I am a Corsican, and Max Renault killed my brother. I will have blood for blood, according to the creed of my race, so help me God, and the Holy Virgin, by this sign!"

And so saying he pressed his lips once more to the sign on his arm, and looked up at them with hungry eyes waiting for them to speak.

CHAPTER XLVI.

TURNING THE TABLES.

THERE was a pause of silence for some moments after the Corsican had done speaking. His three hearers looked at him as they might have looked at some half-wild animal endowed with speech, for it was the first time that any of them had been brought face to face with the personified passion of revenge, which is the concrete form of all that is implied by the terrible word Vendetta.

There was no possibility of mistaking the absolute sincerity of Berthauld for any skilfully simulated pretence for gaining their confidence with a view to betraying their plans to the enemy. The man's whole frame seemed vibrating with the passionate frenzy into which he had worked himself during the telling of his story. Hate and blood-hunger blazed out of his eyes, and his lips were drawn back from his long white teeth like those of an animal ready to spring at the throat of its prey, and then on his arm, which he still kept bared before them, was the livid cross scored in the flesh, the visible sign-manual of his oath and his resolve.

By tacit consent, the other two waited for the oldest man to speak first, and at length Mr. Austen said in a cold, almost judicial tone:

"Mr. Adams has told us that you have already satisfied him of the truth of your story and the sincerity of your intention, and for myself I may also say that I am satisfied. Sir Harry Milton will speak for himself."

Sir Harry nodded, and said briefly:

"You may speak for me too, Mr. Austen. If you are satisfied, I am."

"Very well, then," continued Mr. Austen, turning again to Berthauld. "I may cut matters short by saying that under the extraordinary circumstances of the case we will accept your assistance. You will, of course, understand that we have nothing whatever to do with your private enmity to Renault, or with the motives which lead you to desire revenge upon him, and I must also tell you, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, that if Renault is not killed in battle, and if, as I think very unlikely, we capture him alive, we shall hand him over to the proper authorities for execution, of course taking proper precautions to prevent a second escape."

"I have sworn to kill him with my own hand if I can," said Berthauld, with the hungry gleam still in his eyes, "and if the opportunity offers I shall do so. But if you take him prisoner I will forego that, and only ask that you will make me one of his guards until he is handed over to the hangman, for if you take him he will be yours, not mine, but if I take him I will kill him as I have sworn to do. Does that content you?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Austen. "There can be no fault found with that, though I think the point is hardly worth discussing,

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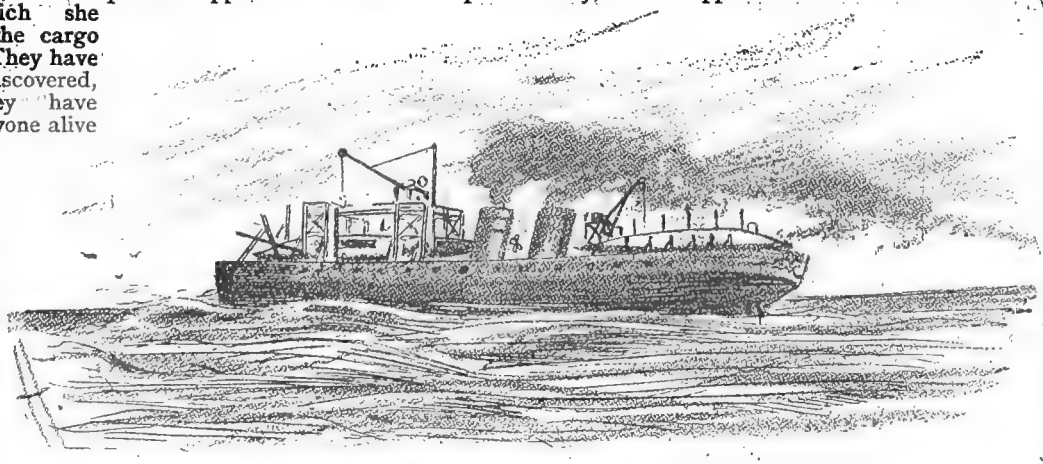
for I cannot believe that he will ever allow himself to be taken alive. He will blow his ship to atoms first with his own hands. But now as regards yourself. You understand, I suppose, that you give yourself as a hostage for your own sincerity."

"Yes," said the Corsican, rising to his feet, and stretching out his arm with the gesture of a man who voluntarily surrenders his liberty. "Until this is accomplished I am yours, body and soul. Do with me as you please. I have no arms, not even a knife, and I want none. You may search me and see. You may guard me night and day on board your air-ship, and shoot me if you even suspect me. I ask nothing but that you will let me help you to hunt this Renault down, and when he is dead, set me free to go about my business."

"That is enough," said Mr. Austen. "You will go on board Mr. Adams' ship as soon as we have decided what is to be done first; and now tell us, if you know, how Renault and his accomplices managed to get their air-ships built."

"Yes, I can do that," said the Corsican. "The North German Lloyd liner, *Bremen*, which they captured, Renault and Hartog transformed into a floating dockyard. They kept her in the South Atlantic, cruising constantly east and west a few degrees south of the Tropic of Capricorn and between the tenth and thirtieth meridians. This, as you no doubt know, is mid-way between the two great steamship tracks to South America on the one side, and the Cape of Good Hope and Australia on the other. The *Destroyer* acts as a sort of tender to her, and keeps her supplied with coals and provisions, which she takes from the cargo steamers. They have never been discovered, because they have never left anyone alive to tell tales. When they have got all they want out of a steamer they send her to the bottom with all hands on board."



Transformed into a floating dockyard.

"The scoundrels!" exclaimed Sir Harry and Mr. Austen in a breath; and Sir Harry, bringing his open hand down with a slap upon his knee, said angrily, "Ordinary justice has no punishment for crimes like that. I begin to see now the reason for the Vendetta."

"It is more just than your justice," said the Corsican quietly. "Think of the friends and kindred, the mothers and the wives and the lovers of those poor fellows whose bones have been picked by the fish in the South Atlantic, and you will see why I want my revenge on Renault.

"But I must go on with my story. The last air-ship that is built on board the *Bremen* always remains by her till the next one is finished, to guard against the accident of being discovered by a war-ship, then the other takes her place, and she goes to the camp at Mount Pietra to join the fleet. More than this, they have establishments for stores and depots for treasure and arms and ammunition at an inlet on the African coast, south of Cape Bojador; another on one of the keys of the Bahamas; another in one of the bayous of Florida; another in the Island of Trinidad, in the Atlantic; and another at your Island of Utopia, which I suppose you know they have taken possession of."

"We didn't know it, but we expected it," said Adams. "But we can very soon turn them out of there. And now, M. Berthauld, we can get to work, I think. I propose that the *War-Hawk* and the *Volante* shall go in company first to Trinidad, destroy the depot there, then you will guide us to the *Bremen* and the *Destroyer*, and we will sink them; and after that——. But stop a minute, there is something else. How do the Anarchists get their materials for building the air-ships, and their ammunition and guns, to the *Bremen*?"

In answer to this question the Corsican described the *Pilgrim* and her work, and added with a laugh: "This gentleman's yacht, as everyone believes her to be, was lying quietly in Plymouth while the attack of the French and Russians was being defeated only a few days ago."

"And where is she now?" asked Sir Harry.

"She had then a full cargo on board, and I believe it was intended for the *Bremen*. If that is so she would sail for the South Atlantic, probably for Trinidad first, as soon as the Channel was clear of French and Russian ships, and so we may overtake her on the way. May I ask, gentlemen, how many ships you will take with you on the expedition?"

"Only the two that are here," replied Adams. "They can fly nearly two hundred miles an hour, and their armaments are much more powerful than anything the Anarchists have, if what we saw in the north last night is any guide."

"Yes, they will be quite enough," said Berthauld. "Renault has about twenty-five ships altogether now, but none of them are as fast as yours. With those two you could fight the whole fleet, and beat it. And now, may I ask when you propose to start, gentlemen?"

"There is nothing to stop us starting at once," said Adams. "And the sooner we are off the better. The *Volante* is quite ready, and I suppose the *War-Hawk* will have filled up her fuel magazines by this time."

"Oh, yes, she'll be quite ready, and we ought to get afloat as soon as possible, so as to be well out of the way before the light gets too strong."

In less than half an hour the two air-ships were afloat again, and flying at sixty miles an hour on a course a little to the west of south. An elevation of four thousand feet was kept, and as the light increased a bright look out was kept for steamers corresponding to the description which Berthauld had given of the *Pilgrim*. As far as they had been able to calculate she ought by this time to be about a thousand miles on her way, supposing she had taken the route to the South Atlantic, and was steering, as in that case she would do, a direct course for the island of Trinidad.

The whole ocean, however, seemed deserted, except far away to the northward, where a few faint smoke hazes betokened the presence of the Atlantic liners and their convoys. The speed was therefore increased, first to a hundred and then to a hundred and fifty miles an hour, and at length, towards four o'clock in the afternoon, Adams, who was scanning the ocean through his glasses from the conning-tower, made out a faint wreath of smoke coming from some solitary steamer far away on the southern horizon.

The two air-ships were flying side by side about a hundred yards apart, and Adams, seeing Mr. Austen in the conning-tower of the *War-Hawk*, attracted his attention by running the *Volante* up closer, and then told him in the deaf and dumb language on his fingers that he had sighted a steamer and wanted to slow down and speak to him. The two air-ships rapidly decreased their speed until they were flying close together at thirty miles an hour, then the slides in the conning-towers were drawn back, and they arranged that if the solitary

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vessel by good fortune proved to be the *Pilgrim* the *Volante* would go down and speak her while the *War-Hawk* remained a thousand feet above her so as to put any idea of resistance out of the question. Then the speed was increased again and twenty minutes later the *Volante* took a downward sweep and stopped a hundred feet from the surface of the water and some half-mile ahead of the steamer.

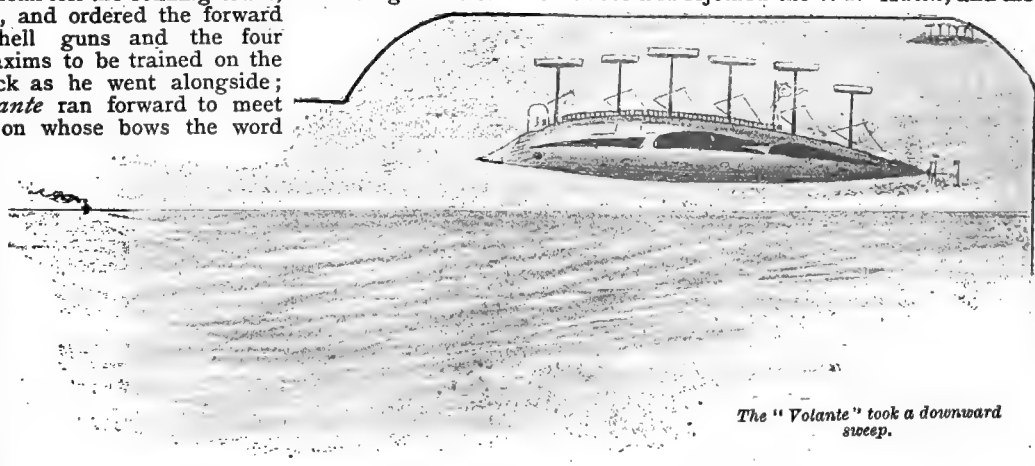
"We are in fortune!" said Berthauld, whom Adams had called into the conning-tower. "That is the *Pilgrim*. I thought it would be, from what they told me about her having to make another voyage soon to the *Bremen*. May I ask what you will do with her now that you have caught her?"

"As soon as I am satisfied that she is the vessel you describe, and is really in the employment of the Anarchists, I shall sink her just as I would sink the *Destroyer* if we were fortunate enough to meet with her," replied Adams. "I will serve her crew as they have served the crews of the steamers they have robbed and sunk. You had better keep out of sight now. I am going to hail her."

"Very good," said Berthauld. "But let me caution you to be careful, for they are just as likely as not to reply to your hail with a volley."

"I will see to that," said Adams shortly. "Now you had better go to the gun-room."

As the Corsican left the conning-tower, Adams signalled to the gun-room, and ordered the forward and after shell guns and the four broadside Maxims to be trained on the steamer's deck as he went alongside; then the *Volante* ran forward to meet the steamer on whose bows the word *Pilgrim* could be distinctly seen. But just as she was slowing down, Adams, who had never taken his eyes off the *Pilgrim's* deck, saw half a dozen men tear the covering off a large boat which she carried on deck amidships, and in this boat he saw a short, mortar-like gun of large calibre mounted on what looked like a swivel-stand.



The "Volante" took a downward sweep.

There could be no mistaking the purpose of this weapon. The *Volante* was well within range, and the obvious object was to send a shell into her as she slowed down. Just as a couple of men jumped into the boat he sent the signal, "Full speed ahead," to the engine room, and the *Volante* sprang forward on an upward leap of a thousand feet as a puff of smoke rose from the boat and a heavy shell went whistling harmlessly away astern of her.

The next instant a couple of shells from the *War-Hawk* struck the water and exploded on either side of the steamer, deluging her decks with water. Then came two from the *Volante*, both of which struck the deck and exploded, tearing two great ragged holes in the planking. Two more from the *War-Hawk* followed in rapid succession. The Anarchists replied as well as they could with their one gun, but the air-ships were far beyond its range, and the fate of Leo Marcel and his crew was soon sealed.

Shell after shell burst on the torn-up deck of the *Pilgrim*, or else in her interior, and before the bombardment had continued a quarter of an hour two of the projectiles exploded together in her stoke-hole, and the next moment, in the midst of a vast cloud of steam and smoke, the *Pilgrim* broke in two and disappeared, taking with her Leo Marcel and sixty Anarchists to the fate to which they had consigned so many of their fellow creatures.

"Like cures like!" laughed Sir Harry grimly to Mr. Austen, who was standing with him in the conning-tower as the *Pilgrim* vanished. "That's the only sort of physic that's any good for the disease of Anarchy."

"Yes," said Mr. Austen, "it's a rather heroic remedy, as Dr. Roberts would say, but I don't think the disease would yield to any other. If she only had the materials for constructing a couple of air-ships on board we haven't done a very bad morning's work. Well, now I suppose it is a case of full speed ahead to the southward."

On the morning of the third day after the sinking of the *Pilgrim* the crews of the two air-ships saw the bare, gaunt rocks of Trinidad rising out of the water. The *War-Hawk* remained aloft as before, and the *Volante* descended to investigate. She found some huts on the desert shores of a bleak hidden bay, but, save for the huge land crabs crawling about them, the whole island appeared to be deserted. A shot was fired to call the attention of any inhabitants that might be there, but there was no response, and Adams decided that it was not worth while wasting time examining the place; so he rose and rejoined the *War-Hawk*, and the two air-ships resumed their journey, flying now in a south-eastward direction, so as to cross the Tropic of Capricorn into the unfrequented regions of the ocean in which they expected to find the *Bremen* and her consort.

When they reached what Berthauld had described as the Anarchists' cruising ground they separated, the *War-Hawk* going to the east and the *Volante* to the west, both flying in a zigzag course at an elevation of five thousand feet, so as to command the largest possible range of vision. It had been settled that whichever of them sighted the *Bremen* first was to return to the spot from which they had started, the latitude and longitude of which had been carefully noted, and then the two were to proceed to the scene of attack together.

It fell to the good fortune of the *War Hawk* to catch the first glimpse of her quarry, and the first eyes which saw her were the pretty brown orbs of Miss Dora. She was standing in the conning-tower—not an infrequent amusement with her now—with Sir Harry, soon after sunrise on the third day of the search, looking down at the water through his glasses, when he saw a quick flush rise to her cheeks, and she leant slightly forward, as though something had caught her attention. Then she took the glasses from her eyes, and handed them to him, saying as she did so:

"Sir Harry! I think I can see something that looks like a little cloud of thin smoke with a dark spot in the middle of it, far away down yonder. Will you have a look, please. Who knows but it might be the *Bremen* or the *Destroyer*."

(To be continued.)

READ MR. GRIFFITH'S NEW SERIAL, just started in PEARSON'S WEEKLY.

ONE PENNY. EVERY SATURDAY.

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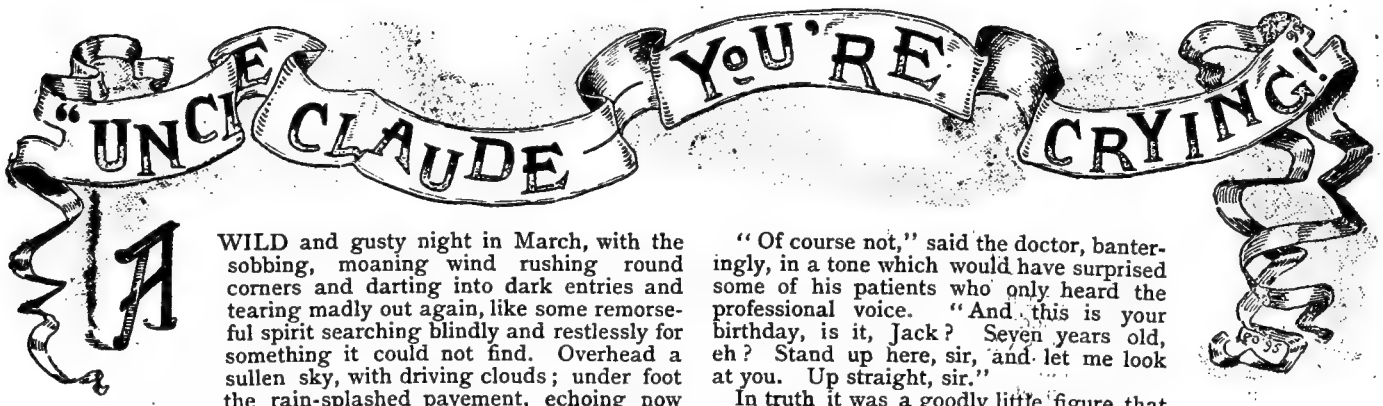

A WILD and gusty night in March, with the sobbing, moaning wind rushing round corners and darting into dark entries and tearing madly out again, like some remorseful spirit searching blindly and restlessly for something it could not find. Overhead a sullen sky, with driving clouds; under foot the rain-splashed pavement, echoing now and then to a hurrying footfall.

Dr. Barton turned into the long and sombre street in which his house was situated, and bent his tall figure to the wind. The street was deserted, and he paused for a moment and glanced round, with a musing smile upon his lips.

"Just such a night—four years ago—I found the boy under my porch. Let me see, what is the date? The 15th—March 15. The very day! Strange that I should think of it now. I was coming home from old Lady Waller's—dead now, poor soul! Of course I was. Just such a night!"

He passed on, and into his own warmly lit hall.

As he removed his wraps a trim maidservant came into view.

"Has Master Jack—ah—retired yet, Mary?"

"Not yet, sir. He got Miss Ward to hear his lessons all over again to-night, purposely to stop up, sir. Master Jack said as he would stay up to-night, sir, to see you."

The ghost of a smile flitted over the grave face of the doctor, and he turned to the dining-room. The lamps on the table were turned very low, but a cheerful fire burned on the broad hearth, and threw flickering shadows over the old-fashioned furniture and on the long, full-length portraits which hung on the walls.

On the great bearskin before the fire lay a child—a boy of some seven years, with thick, fair hair tossed about his face. He was clad in a loosely fitting sailor suit of brown velvet. His cheek rested on one small hand, and the soft, childish face was turned towards the fire.

The doctor paused for a moment, with his hands clasped behind his back, his head bent, looking down at the child, with a smile on his face.

"Four years ago," he muttered. "If I had turned him into the streets then—had sent him to the workhouse, as my friends charitably suggested—how different it would all have been. He has made this dull old place a home, and life a purpose, not a mere striving, and striving, and ending in nothing, as some one says. And so the little chap has waited up for me—on his birthday night, too. I ought not to have forgotten it. I must get that pony to-morrow. I expect the young rascal will ride as well as he does everything else."

He dropped softly into a chair, still looking at the sleeping child.

The opening of the door and the entrance of a servant to turn up the lights woke the boy. He opened his eyes, and lay for a moment looking solemnly at the blazing fire before him.

The doctor spoke softly, almost caressingly.

"Well, Jack?"

The child started up and sprang towards him. The little firmly-knit figure slipped between the man's knees, and drew one velvet-covered arm round the doctor's black coat collar, turning up his smiling face towards the grave one above him.

"I didn't see you, Uncle Claude. Have you been here long? Miss Ward wanted me to go to bed, but I couldn't, you know, on my birthday without wishing you good-night."

"And so you fell asleep here instead, eh, Jack? Suppose I had gone off again and left you, what then?"

"But you wouldn't, you know," said the child softly, nestling more closely to him.

"Of course not," said the doctor, banteringly, in a tone which would have surprised some of his patients who only heard the professional voice. "And this is your birthday, is it, Jack? Seven years old, eh? Stand up here, sir, and let me look at you. Up straight, sir."

In truth it was a goodly little figure that stood before the doctor and looked laughingly and fearlessly into his face. The small, delicately and yet strongly modelled limbs, the refined face, with its touch of graceful pride, and the poise of the little curly head carried satisfaction to the heart of the man, who, while he passionately loved the child, viewed these things with a certain feeling of anatomical pride.

He sat quietly for a long time with his arm round the little figure, gazing at a portrait that hung over the mantelpiece—the portrait of a young girl. A fair, bright face, with a strange gravity in the dark, great eyes.

He drew the boy more closely to him with a sudden movement of his arm, and bent his head so that it touched the child's curls.

"If she had lived!" he murmured. "If she had lived! Perchance it's better as it is, and the child fills my life."

. . . . . .

"Mr. Kennedy, sir."

Dr. Barton roused himself from a brown study, into which he had fallen before the fire, and rose to greet his friend.

"Very good of you, Kennedy, to come in. You lawyers are not like the kill-or-cure gentry. We must always be at our posts; you can close your office at a certain time, and say 'good-bye' to it all for a few hours."

"And dream of coming litigations and obstinate clients, my friend," said the visitor, stepping forward and shaking the doctor's outstretched hand. "Well, every man to his trade, you know, Barton. I might throw in a little Latin, but I reserve that also for the office. What a night, to be sure! Thought I'd just step round and have a chat. The women folk have a musical evening, I think they call it, and I escaped. Amateur music is like injudicious flattery: it grates upon one's nerves. And we have nerves, even in the law."

Mr. Kennedy laughed cheerfully and passed his hand over his clean-shaven face.

They were seated by this time, with the cigars and a spirit stand between them.

"I've just sent that boy of mine off to bed," said the doctor, yawning; "it's his birthday, and the young rascal must, of course, wait up to see me."

"Ah, I know! They always remember their birthdays. I've five of them, and they never allow me to forget."

"Oh, the little chap didn't wait up for that. He knew I shouldn't forget him."

Mr. Kennedy winked solemnly, puffing at his cigar, and said nothing.

"Yes, time flies," went on the doctor, with a half sigh. "The boy's seven years old to-day."

"Counting from——?" said the lawyer, interrogatively.

"From the time he came—to me. That is, supposing him to have been about three years of age at the time. Speaking professionally, that was his age, as nearly as could be guessed."

"Ah! Well, he's a fine little chap—although you wouldn't take my advice about him, Barton."

"What, to send him to the workhouse?"

"Either that, or to endeavour to find out his people. You did neither."

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"I tell you now, as I told you then, Kennedy, that he is no ordinary child—comes of no common stock. The people who placed him there did it with a purpose. The matter had, I should imagine, been carefully considered, and they knew to whom they were confiding him. I knew at once that he had gentle blood in his veins, and—and I was content to leave the rest. That boy, Kennedy, will turn out well, and I shall be proud of him: As proud of his manhood as I am of his present childhood."

"If he does," said the other, with a short laugh, "he'll have your training to thank for it. Place any child in such surroundings as these—in a refined home, with trained servants to anticipate his wants, and no discordant note to jar on his life—and he must be of very poor stuff indeed if he doesn't shape well. The little beggar couldn't help himself."

"That has little to do with it, Kennedy. My experience has been a large one, and young as he was when he first entered this house I know at once that he had been well and carefully trained, and from the very formation of his childish limbs—the very contour of his skull—that he had good blood in his veins. You know, Kennedy," pursued the doctor, more eagerly, leaning forward in his chair, with his hands on his knees, "I am a believer in these things—in—in fact—in heredity. I have good old blood in my veins, my father was a man whose ancestors had held their place—the place the old fellow was obliged to sell at last—for hundreds of years."

"Well, what of that? Is it any good to you? Has it been of any use to you? Are you in any way a better man for it?"

"Yes, I hope so. There is an indefinable something in—in a man of breeding, which necessarily is of material assistance to him in his intercourse with his fellows—to say nothing of his natural pride in his family name."

"You know that you and I never agree on that, doctor. You have no acres to be proud of, and your birth was a question of fate—the kindly fate which led your father to cast sheep's eyes at his future wife. The blood which tells in this world of ours is the blood which runs in the veins of a genius—that grander species of creature that rises superior to birth and circumstances, and cares nothing for the conventional fluid which flows within him, be it as 'old' as William the Conqueror, or as 'new' as the equally necessary fluid which animates the heavy carcase of a Chicago millionaire. Blood is nothing to him, he knows what he is, and he sings his songs, or otherwise makes his fiery mark on the roll of fame, and goes out again in some erratic fashion not usually approved by the aristocracy. You ought to be prouder of the fact that your ancestors played fast and loose with this country during the Wars of the Roses."

Dr. Barton shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"It's useless to try and convince you, Kennedy. So far as the boy is concerned, I am well satisfied in regard to my first judgment. As you know, we could make nothing of his name when he first came to us—some pet name apparently—and I gave him my old father's name, John—John Barton. It is an old and honoured name, Kennedy, and my boy will be worthy of it. He has the right stuff in him. Mark you this, Kennedy. So certain am I—and so jealous am I of the name my ancestors bore, that I would cast the child off to-morrow, hard blow though it would be—if I discovered that his parentage had not—not been what I believe it to be. But I have no fear in regard to that."

"That would be a frightful injustice to the child!" exclaimed the lawyer, hotly.

"Well, well," said the doctor, waving his hand and smiling gravely, "it is a matter we need not discuss. The possibility is so very remote."

Both men were silent for a time, and the driving rain sounded distinctly on the windows, and the wind still sobbed round the houses like a lost thing.

"Four years ago, is it?" said the lawyer at last, musingly. "And just such a night. Do you remember? I came in and found you here with the child, and a bonny little chap he certainly looked. Ah! Barton," he added, laughingly, shaking his head at the other, "why the dickens don't you marry, as you ought to have done, and take these sort of responsibilities in a legitimate fashion? You've had enough of them, probably."

"Thanks, this is about as much as I desire in that way," said Barton, quietly, with a glance on the portrait.

"By the way, you found something on the child, didn't you—an amulet, or something of the kind?"

"Yes," said the doctor, slowly: "the half of a ring of peculiar pattern, such as I sometimes remember to have seen in Eastern bazaars during my wanderings in earlier days. They are generally in the form of a rope, of a peculiar dark metal, and of two or three strands, the strands laid side by side. This had evidently been a two-strand ring (they are rarely seen in Europe—considered almost valueless, you know) and the metal between the strands being thin and soft the two halves had evidently been separated, leaving two perfect rings. One was hung, by a ribbon, round the baby's neck."

"Queer!" ejaculated Mr. Kennedy. "However, he's a fine little chap and talks like a young prince. That ought to be enough for any one." He pulled out his watch and glanced at it. "I must be going, Barton. Even musical evenings don't last for ever, and I dare say the worst of the business is over now. Don't you trouble to come out."

"I shall walk with you as far as the end of the street," said the doctor, as they passed into the hall.

"But, my dear fellow, it's raining like———"

"That doesn't matter," interrupted the doctor, "I'm used to it. Besides I feel restless to-night, and a stroll—even in the rain—is the very thing I want."

They put on their overcoats and passed out. The rain had almost ceased, but the wind howled mournfully. At the end of the street the lawyer paused and held out his hand.

"Good-night, Barton. This is my way, you know. I suppose you'll turn back now."

"Y—yes—I think so."

"Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

Dr. Barton stood alone at the corner of the street, watching his friend's retreating figure, but he did not turn back. He paused irresolutely for a moment, and then slowly crossed the road and turned out towards the busier, more fully lighted streets. A little crowd of people brushing hurriedly in front of him caused him to stop for a moment with his hands thrust into his pockets, looking after them. They were following a woman—a jeering, staggering creature, dressed in tawdry finery. Even as he looked there was a warning shout from the crowd, a shriek from the woman, a hansom cabman standing up in his "dickey," with the reins drawn tightly up against his breast and the horse almost on its haunches, and the woman under the horse's feet, silent enough now. They pulled her out, and Dr. Barton pushed his way to the front.

"Stand back, there; I'm a doctor. Stand back, I say."

He looked at her closely. Blood was trickling from an ugly wound in her head. By his directions a dozen willing hands raised her up and lifted her into the cab, and the doctor directed the driver to go to the nearest hospital, getting in himself with her.

"They'll know me there, although I don't think I've brought in a case myself before," he muttered, with a smile.

"Here, get these things off, nurse," said Dr. Barton, as the woman lay, still unconscious, on a table. "You didn't expect to see me here again to-night, eh? Stumbled across a patient for you. Ah, that's better! Now we can see what the damage is. Ah," he said, after a longer pause, "ribs. Thought so, and some concussion. What an awful state the creature's in, to be sure. Been drinking for weeks, I should think. Get these things off and get her to bed, and——"

Dr. Barton had stopped like one shot. In passing his hand over the unconscious form he had touched a frayed and soiled piece of ribbon fastened round the neck and threaded through the half of an Eastern ring of peculiar dark metal.

. . . . . .

The cold dawn was breaking over the still deserted streets when Dr. Barton passed through the hall of his house, and walked slowly, like one in a dream, up the broad staircase. He entered his study and closed and locked the door. He turned up the gas and walked across the room to a little

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cabinet which stood in a corner, unlocked it with a key from the bunch he took from his pocket, and threw open the doors. Within, on two shelves, lay some childish garments, thrown in carelessly, it was easy to see, by a man's hand.

The doctor thrust his hand among the garments and drew out a little wash-leather bag. With this in his hand he turned to his writing-table and seated himself, and laid the little bag before him. For a long time he sat, his hand grasping his chin, lost in a reverie. At last he roused himself with a start, pulled the string that held the bag closed, and shook out its contents on the blotting paper before him. Then he took from his waistcoat a piece of soiled and faded ribbon. with a narrow ring attached.

"I need not have troubled to compare them," he murmured at last, huskily. "Exactly alike. The halves joined after all. Were not her raving, blasphemous words enough, before she died? His mother! My God!"

The doctor's head fell forward on his clasped hands.

He raised his head at last and gazed straight before him, with his hard, set face white and haggard.

"I might have known. I might have known. No high-born child would be left on a doorstep to the mercy of another's varying charity. Kennedy was right. A pretty babe, reared in such refinement, would look well enough and pass muster. But afterwards"—he shuddered—"when he mixes with his fellows—when his evil blood tells—when he bears my father's honoured name and drags it in the dust. What a blind fool I have been! I will end it. The name is not his. He shall not keep it. I will not send him to the workhouse, but he shall be put to some good middle-class school, and later on I—I will apprentice him to some useful trade."

All the weary hours, until the household was astir, Dr. Barton paced the floor of his study. All the weary hours of the next day he carefully avoided the child and came home at night so very late that the little fellow was in bed.

When seated before the fire in the dining-room—perchance with a wistful recollection of the little velvet-clad figure of the evening before—a sudden thought struck him and he rang the bell.

"Send me the nurse."

The nurse entered. She was a kindly-faced substantial-looking woman.

The doctor did not look at her, but kept his eyes fixed upon the fire.

"How—how is—Master Jack, nurse?"

"He seems very well, sir, but I told him as you were busy, sir. To-night he wanted to wait up again, but I said as I was sure you wouldn't like it, sir, and Miss Ward said so, too, sir."

"Quite right, nurse, quite right."

"He's a dear little man, sir, that he is. There ain't a boy like him in the three kingdoms—I'm sure there ain't, sir."

"Yes—yes—nurse, that'll do, thank you."

The woman retired from the room and the doctor resumed his musing attitude before the fire.

"Four years ago. And he is a fine boy, as she says. But that woman! No, no! he can be nothing to me."

. . . . . .

Dr. Barton was seated at breakfast, and was gazing down a long expanse of white tablecloth at Master Jack.

The doctor had not yet summoned up courage to give the order as he had intended, that Master Jack should be separated entirely from him, and should take his meals in the nursery. The little figure had become so much a part of his life—he seemed to watch so eagerly, even now, for its coming. But he had tried to infuse a certain coldness into his tones, and the child had looked at him more than once with a wondering reproach that had gone to the grave man's heart.

In truth, the little figure looked so lonely now and its eyes were so pathetic, that the doctor said quickly:

"Come up here, Jack. I want to talk to you."

The boy slipped from his chair with a flushed face, and climbed into a seat beside the doctor. For all his stern resolutions the man could not help putting his arm round the child.

The little face cleared in an instant and nestled close to the doctor.

"Jack—did—did—" the doctor paused and coughed. "Do you remember anything about anybody—before you remember me and nurse?"

"I remember sometimes at night," began the child, softly, "when I am nearly asleep. It comes back—a little at a time."

"What comes back?" asked the doctor, hoarsely, without looking at him, and speaking almost in a whisper.

"A big figure, in a very bright dress, who used to hold me on his shoulder. I know I used to play with the bright buttons on his coat. And he had a moustache—I know it must have been a moustache—it used to tickle me when he kissed me."

"And your mother? Do you remember her?"

"No, Uncle Claude. I can't remember any one else. Did you know her? But, of course, you must have done. How silly I am. Was she pretty?"

Still with his arm round the little figure the doctor said, quietly:

"Very pretty, when she knew you, my boy. She is dead, you know. I was with her when—when she died."

"How good you are. I had a dream last night, Uncle Claude," went on the child, in his soft, low tones. "I dreamt that I was away, far away somewhere in the cold—and the dark, and—and you were gone. And when I stopped and cried out, I heard some one say, quite a long way off, out of sight, that text of mine the nurse gave me the other morning and I mixed up so. You remember that one about 'visiteth the sins of the fathers on the'—why, Uncle Claude, you're crying——"

But the doctor, with a passionate gesture, had caught the little figure to his breast, and covered the childish mouth with his hand.

. . . . . .

"Barton's not a bad sort of fellow, you know, but he's very illogical at times, and even rude," said Lawyer Kennedy to a mutual friend the other day. "I was talking to him the other night and happened to touch on heredity—always a strong point with him. What do you think he said?"

"Don't know, I'm sure."

"He was awfully abrupt. Snapped me up in a moment. Simply said:

"'Heredity be hanged!'"

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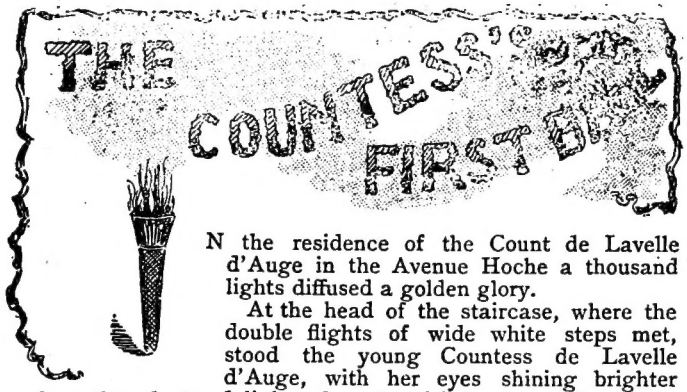

N the residence of the Count de Lavelle d'Auge in the Avenue Hoche a thousand lights diffused a golden glory.

At the head of the staircase, where the double flights of wide white steps met, stood the young Countess de Lavelle d'Auge, with her eyes shining brighter than the clustered lights above her fair head, and her heart beating high with gratified ambition beneath the load of jewels which literally covered her bosom and pale blue bodice.

Her ball, the first she had given since her marriage, was quite a success. No rival hostess would be able to point to such a list of guests as would appear in to-morrow's papers—an English Prince, a score of German barons, a crowned head from Asia, and three Russian grand dukes, the entire Cabinet, and every intellectual celebrity of the day. And, to crown all, her only brother's engagement to Miss Caroline Westchester, the richest and prettiest English girl who ever visited Paris, had been announced that afternoon, so that the little Countess was in the seventh heaven of delight.

"Dear Countess, you look radiant—and no wonder, your party is charming."

It was a new arrival who spoke, as she held out a slim ungloved hand, and smiling down the while from her grand height to her hostess.

The Countess smiled up into the great slumbrous eyes of the Princess Katinka Vladoff.

"How good of you to come, Princess. Are you any better to-night? You look lovely, you know, in those big rubies."

Tall, and pale as a fading lily, Princess Katinka passed among the throng. Her soft white gown was swathed about a form that was too thin for perfect beauty; but the faulty lines of throat and arms were veiled in priceless laces, and made a fitting background to the huge gleaming rubies.

Standing beneath the broad fan-leaves of a palm she listened, with her grave smile, to the gossip, which a few days of illness rendered fresh to her ears.

"Have you seen the Countess's sister-in-law-elect?"

To all the tittle-tattle around her Princess Katinka had replied with her slow smile. Only the last question roused her a little.

"I didn't know the Countess had a brother to be married," she said in her low voice.

"Oh, yes, she has. He's a good-looking fellow, but quite poor. I expect it's only his connection by marriage with the Count de Lavelle d'Auge that has given him a chance with Caroline Westchester, who is quite pretty and nice."

It was the Princess Caquet-Boubec who spoke, while her little grey eyes wandered over the crowd.

"There's Noel Chantry and Miss Westchester. I really must go and congratulate them."

"Noel Chantry!" "Noel Chantry!" The words surged and roared in the Princess's ears like the rolling waters of an everlasting sea.

For a moment—an hour—she did not know which, a mighty blackness blotted out the sparkle of jewels and the flash of light.

Then the veil lifted, and amid the ever-moving faces one fair *insouciant*, with laughing blue eyes and a full red mouth that a golden moustache scarcely hid, stood out. He was standing in a *loggia* of rose-coloured marble which overhung the white staircase and hall. His head was bent down to a girl, pretty and slight, with the fragile clear beauty of English women.

Some force within her took her to the Countess's side and spoke, with her voice:

"Dear Countess, I have just heard that you are owed a double congratulation. Your brother——"

"Ah! Noel, you mean!" cried the Countess in sparkling tones. "We're delighted. She's quite the catch of the season, and such a sweet girl, too. May I introduce them both to you?"

"Noel! I want to present you to Princess Katinka Vladoff. My brother has travelled in Poland, Princess, and may know your part of the world."

"Will you come?" said Noel, offering his arm to the tall, pale woman at his side.

"No, I want to talk to you."

"I have been hoping to see you for years, Monsieur Chantry. Now I've found you I cannot release you so soon."

"Yes, it's quite ages since we met. But I've never forgotten my delightful visit to your most interesting country," he said, airily.

"Neither have I," was her grave reply.

"And I suppose the dear old castle is just the same, and the quaint village——. But won't you really have supper?"

"The old castle is there and the quaint village, Noel Chantry. Why don't you ask about the ruined mill where we first met? Would you like to hear news of the inn parlour where, on the day of the great snowstorm, you took my hand and swore you loved me—and where I gave you my first maiden's kiss?"

"Have you finished?" he muttered.

"Finished! Would that you had finished there! Can you not picture the winding stair on which we kissed 'Good-bye,' or recall that weather-worn mountain at the foot of which you struck my brother down——."

"For mercy's sake, be silent!"

"Surely you remember!" Involuntarily he turned his eyes from the poor thin figure, wasted and ravaged by consumption.

His action infuriated her, and she sprang at him, striking him across the mouth with her heavily-jewelled hands.

"Murderer! You think you are going to rise to honour through your sister—to wealth through your bride; but I am your wife, Noel Chantry. Before God you married me. And I will tell the world what you are."

Suddenly Katinka caught sight of Caroline Westchester. The pretty English girl was smiling and curtseying to some Royalties who were congratulating her upon her engagement.

Above, in the rose marble *loggia*, Katinka rushed forward to the low balustrade, but Noel was at her heels.

Those below and on the staircase saw as in a flash a white-faced woman lean out over the hall. Then the great house of Newlands was rent with an awful cry—the cry of a woman gone untimely to a fearful death.

Quickly they covered it up, as it lay a crushed and shapeless mass upon the snowy marble floor. Men and women fled from the house, and the brilliant lights faded into darkness.

But it was grey dawn when the Countess crept up the wide marble stair, and slipped ghost-like along the gallery till she reached the *loggia* of rose marble.

A dark figure was huddled on the low seat. She could not repress a low cry at the sight of the livid face raised to hers.

"How did you know I was here? Does anyone——" came from the drawn lips.

"Hush! I saw your face for one moment behind her shoulder. Tell me, Noel, was it an accident—or—suicide?"

"It was—suicide," he said, presently, after careful thought.

"I thought so," she said, slowly and incisively. "You tried, did you not, Noel, to prevent the awful deed?"

He bowed in answer.

"I thought so. Now go and get some rest. You must go early in the morning to inquire after Miss Westchester. She was a great deal upset by the occurrence."

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A

POSITIVE REMEDY

FOR

CORPULENCE

Any remedy that can be suggested as a cure or alleviation for stoutness will be heartily welcomed. We have recently received a well-written book, the author of which seems to know what he is talking about. It is entitled "Corpulency and the Cure," 256 pages, and is a cheap issue (only 4d.) published by Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C. Our space will not do justice to this book; send for it yourself. It appears that Mr. Russell has submitted all kinds of proofs to the English Press. The editor of the *Tablet*, the Catholic organ, writes:—"Mr. Russell does not give us the slightest loophole for a doubt as to the value of his cure, for, in the most straightforward and matter-of-fact manner, he submitted some hundreds of original and unsolicited testimonial letters for our perusal, and offered us plenty more, if required. To assist him to make this remedy known, we think we cannot do better than publish quotations from some of the letters submitted. The first one, a marchioness, writes from Madrid:—'My son, Count ——, has reduced his weight in twenty-two days 16 kilos—*i.e.*, 34 lbs.' Another writes:—'So far (six weeks from commencement of following your system) I have lost fully two stone in weight.' The next (a lady) writes:—'I am just half the size.' A fourth:—'I find it is successful in my case. I have lost 8 lbs. in weight since I commenced (two weeks).' Another writes: 'A reduction of 18 lbs. in a month is a great success.' A lady from Bournemouth writes:—'I feel much better, have less difficulty in breathing, and can walk about.' Again a lady says:—'It reduced me considerably, not only in the body, but all over.' The author is very positive. He says:—'Step on a weighing machine on Monday morning and and again on Tuesday, and I guarantee you have lost 2 lbs. in weight without the slightest harm, and vast improvement in health through ridding the system of unhealthy accumulations.'"—*Cork Herald.*

Should Stout Persons STARVE THEMSELVES?

We are afraid that semi-starvation as a cure for corpulency prevails very much to a dangerous degree. Mr. Archer, the late well-known prominent jockey, was in the habit of going without food for a long stretch in order that he could ride a certain horse at its weight, and there is not much doubt that the debility resulting from this habit of abstemiousness was certainly not conducive to combating the dire attack of fever, which was, perhaps, indirectly responsible for the untimely end, in the zenith of his fame, of this unfortunate but accomplished horseman. Even Mary Jane in the kitchen will eat sparingly of the food allowed her, while she will seek to reduce her fat by copious draughts from the vinegar cruet, and succeed only in injuring the coats of her stomach—the forerunner of dyspeptic troubles which will be difficult to overcome.

The Continental medicos seem to advocate this great reduction of ordinary foods, but one of these savants suggests that the stout person should eat considerably of fatty meats, in order that the appetite is appeased, and consequently less food required, so that practically this is indirectly advocating semi-starvation. On the other hand, Mr. Russell, the British specialist, take a different course. He says, "Eat as much as you like," and as it is an acknowledged fact that under his treatment persons lose from 2 lb. to 12 lb. per week, it beyond doubt stands out pre-eminent against those so-called starvation cures "made in Germany." Some claim that Mr. Russell has to insist upon his patients drinking hot water every morning, but on the contrary he avers that it is dangerous to do so, and has, of course, never advised it. No; the success of Mr. Russell's treatment is incomparably beyond other specialists, for he resorts to no stringent dietary, and simply prescribes a harmless vegetable tonic combination which is the outcome of years of study and botanical research. We advise all those interested in this question to get his book, the price of which is only 4d. It is entitled, "Corpulency and the Cure," 256 pp., and is published by him at Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square London, W.C. It can be had direct, or through any bookseller.—Extract from *The Million.*

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